

Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the above-identified application:

1. – 25. (Canceled)

26. (Previously Presented) A method for dynamically supporting the spine in the area of the facet joint, comprising the steps of:

providing a spinal implant rod;

providing at least a fixation connector assembly and a sliding connector assembly, each said connector assembly comprising a post and a connecting member having a rod connecting portion and a post connecting portion, said sliding connector assembly having a rod connecting portion with structure for slidable engagement of said rod, said fixation connector assembly having a rod connecting portion with structure for engaging said rod so as to prevent sliding movement of said rod relative to said connector assembly;

positioning and securing said post of said sliding connector assembly or said fixation connector assembly in the area of the superior articular facet of a lower vertebrae, and positioning and securing said post of the other of said sliding connector

assembly or said fixation connector assembly in the area of an inferior articular facet of an adjacent upper vertebrae; and,

securing said rod to said sliding connector assembly so as to be slidable relative thereto postoperatively, and securing said rod to said fixation connector assembly so as to prevent slidable movement relative thereto postoperatively.

27. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 26, wherein a portion of said connecting member pivots to permit pivoting of said rod about an axis transverse to a long axis of said post.

28. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 27, wherein each rod connecting portion is pivotally engaged to said post connecting portion and said rod connecting portion and said rod pivot about an axis transverse to a long axis of said post.

29. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 26, wherein said post connecting portion slides relative to said post along a long axis thereof.

30. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 26, wherein the post comprises a screw portion, said securing step comprising screwing said screw portion into said vertebrae.

31. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 26, wherein said connecting member pivots polyaxially relative to the rod.

32. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 26, further comprising the step of increasing resistance to angulation as the degree of angulation increases.

33. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 26, further comprising the step of securing a second sliding connector assembly, a second fixation connector assembly, and a second rod to an opposite lateral side of said vertebrae by positioning and securing said post of said second sliding connector assembly or said second fixation connector assembly in the area of the superior articular facet of a lower vertebrae, and positioning and securing said post of the other of said second sliding connector assembly or said second fixation connector assembly in the area of an inferior articular facet of an adjacent upper vertebrae; and,

securing said second rod to said sliding connector assembly so as to be slidable relative thereto postoperatively, and securing said second rod to said second fixation connector assembly so as to prevent slidable movement relative thereto postoperatively.

34. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 33, further comprising the step of attaching a crosslinking member to and between said spinal rods.

35. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 26, wherein said spinal rod is positioned so as to be substantially parallel to the spinal column.

36. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 26, wherein said spinal rod articulates in the sagittal plane.

37. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 26, wherein said rod is shaped to define a desired bending of the spine, such that bending of the spine causes sliding movement of the connector relative to said rod, and said rod guides said connector according to a path defined by said rod.

38. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 26, wherein said connecting member is movable over the screw, and the screw is shaped to provide a path and guides the motion of the spine during bending of the spine.

39. (Canceled)